

## BOOK REVIEW

*Ovid's Heroides and the Ethopoeia*. By MARTINA BJÖRK. Lund: Studia Graeca et Latina Lundensia 22, 2016. Pp.351. Paper, 317 SEK. ISBN 978-91-88473-00-4.

The volume under review is a doctoral dissertation defended by Martina Björk at Lund University in Sweden in the autumn of 2016. The subject is the alleged influence of rhetorical training on Ovid's *Heroides* or verse epistles of mythological heroines; the author explores the similarity of the poet's work to the rhetorical exercise of *ethopoeia*, or the imitation of another person's manners or characteristics. The latest addition to the small but impressive catalogue of titles on classical philology from Lund University is one of the more successful recent studies of Ovid's *Heroides*; throughout, the author exercises a sober analysis of difficult verse, with a thorough grounding in the work of her predecessors and valuable guide to future studies.

It is no longer the case that Ovid's *Heroides* can be said to languish in neglect in comparison to his *Metamorphoses* or *Amores*. Significant work has been done on the intriguing collection of poems to which Björk devoted her graduate thesis; her book is a product of an especially fruitful decade or so of scholarly investigation on both sides of the Atlantic. Valuably, Björk opens her work with an account of the question of the authenticity and transmission of the text of Ovid's collection (both the single and the double epistles; this is followed by a fine treatment of the place of the *Heroides* in the Ovidian corpus (the comparison to the exilic poetry is especially well done). The section on the history of scholarship (principally literary criticism) on the poems offers a welcome précis of the aforementioned spate of relatively recent studies. All future students of the *Heroides* will want to study these sections of Björk's volume with care; she expertly outlines an increasingly daunting body of work (and vexed transmission history).

Having situated her work in its scholarly context, Björk proceeds to her particular concern: the *Heroides* as poetic product of the rhetorical tradition. Along the way, the question of the quality of Ovid's work is also addressed: do the *Heroides* succeed as poetry of a high caliber? Are the themes and sentiments of the *Heroides* repetitious and even boring? What exactly was Ovid attempting in these

works, and does he succeed in his compositional endeavors? In short, were nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars justified in their comparative neglect of these works, either for reasons of suspicion of authenticity, or out of justified question of the quality of the poet's achievement? Björk is a master of teasing out useful analysis and information from questions that are sometime ignored out of a presumption that the answers are self-evident.

If Björk's first chapter offers an admirable overview of the state of scholarship on the *Heroides*, the second does the same for the question of the influence of rhetorical training on Latin literature, a treatment that leads the way to the peculiar case of *ethopoeia*. A brief examination of Ovid's alleged use of the rhetorical trope in the *Metamorphoses* is followed by a more detailed appraisal of the same technique in the *Heroides*; the precedence of the later work is justified on the grounds that more study has been done of Ovid's employment of *ethopoeia* in his *magnum opus*.

Björk succeeds in establishing the inspiration of contemporary oratorical practice on Ovid's poems, and—perhaps most valuably—in providing insights thereby into the practice and methodology of poetic composition. Throughout Björk's monograph there is a palpable sense of the poet at labor, of the manner and mode of Ovidian composition. There is a freshness to this treatment of Ovid's memorial to his mythological heroines—and the results of Björk's study are applicable to other titles in the Ovidian catalogue (especially the *Amores*).

In short, Björk's slender and unassuming volume will be of interest both to Ovidian scholars and to those interested in the tradition of oratory and schools of rhetoric at Rome. The bibliography and *index locorum* offer guides both to further study and to convenient investigation of particular passages; all passages from classical languages are translated. Dissertations from smaller university presses can sometimes fade into an undeserved obscurity; Björk's Ovid thesis is ample testament that good work is being done on Augustan verse in Sweden, and her fine treatment of Ovid's letters from heroines merits close study and rereading.

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